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ABSTRACT

Studying the characteristics of development extension agents can help in the understanding of the dynamics of development. These key personnel exhibit certain traits, not yet corroborated scientifically, as they attempt to induce drastic changes in the values, beliefs, production, and consumption patterns of developing nations in order to move them toward the prevailing socio-economic state of affluent societies. Financed by government funds, development extension agents work under government rather than target-group authority. They have little empathy for other ways of life and little rapport with target groups that do not share their higher education and living standards. They lack trust in the self-help capabilities of non-elite peoples. The agents extend the images of unlimited good and unlimited aspiration to people whose beliefs center on the finite nature of desirable things. They are innovative and modernist but advocate the maximum possible change rather than the minimum required change. With limited time and world views, they disregard the world's resources. Agents should modify their behaviors and attitudes because of the dangers of imposing a minority way of life on a majority and because of resource/consumption imbalances. Development should satisfy life needs without endangering life itself. (SB)

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ON THE SUBCULTURE OF DEVELOPMENT EXTENSION AGENTS FROM OVERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Paper prepared for the Rural Sociological Society Annual Meeting, Lexington, Ky., USA, August 17 - 2o, 1983

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1. Introduction

In his book "The Nature Of Mass Poverty" [1], J.K. Galbraith recalls the early weeks of the year 1949 when he was member of the State Department's Committee which had the task of clarifying what the US could /should do in pursuit of the well-known Point IV Declaration by President Truman. Among other points, Galbraith notes that none of the concerned and consulted persons had a clear conception what the poor countries needed or what one could achieve with one form or another of technical aid.[2]

Thirtyfour years later, we can now say that many people have in the mean-time spent a lot of energy on formulating clear conceptions for 'modernisation' programs and on trying to put them into practice. Some success has been achieved. But the overall picture of the world is gloomier than before: not only is the human condition in poor regions and countries very serious but the rich countries themselves are on the verge of catastrophe in the fields of environmental damage, resource exhaustion, armament for war, nuclear holocaust.

Even if opinions on the seriousness of the socio-economic condition of this world may differ, there seems to be reason enough to try to better understand the dynamics of development efforts in order to make future efforts more fruitful, if possible. The following study of the key persons in those efforts, called 'development extension agents', is an attempt in this direction.

2. Major Aspects Of The Subculture Of Development Extension Agents

2.1 Why Study Development Extension Agents ?

How is it possible in this era of scientific and

technical perfectionism that on the one hand so many people in this world do not have enough to eat, do not receive an education functional for enabling them to satisfy their physical subsistence needs, do not participate as far as they could in the socio-political decision making processes of their communities and nations ? And, on the other hand, how is it possible that the 'rich' countries exploit the resources of this world to a degree by far exceeding their legitimate share ?

When we - Western scientists - try to understand the characteristics and dynamics of those groups of people who are poor, 'below the poverty line', living in 'underdeveloped' environments, we tend to engage in thorough as well as specific studies of their conditions of living, their values and beliefs, their farming and trading systems, etc..

A very intriguing summary of such studies was published in 1969 by E.M. Rogers/L. Svenning: "The Subculture Of Peasantry"[3]. Since then, many more studies of similar nature have been made.[4] To this author, however, there seems to exist still a certain lack of studies on the national and international suprastructures influencing poor peoples' living conditions, and on those people who think they can help those poor people behind mud walls to develop themselves, to develop their economies. The limited understanding of the development extension agents by their own fellow citizens as well as by the poor, 'underdeveloped' target groups abroad seems to cause many failures of development efforts.

Since the scientific terminology used by Rogers/Svenning (op. cit., Chapter 2)[5] for the analysis of human obstacles to development in the case of peasants, still seems to dominate the minds of development extensionists it shall, mutatis mutandis, also be used for this preliminary attempt to analyse the characteristics of development extension agents. In such an effort to make general observations on a group of people who may show great inter-

individual differences, some degree of injustice to individuals may occur. This may be allowed here for the sake of better understanding of the common traits and corresponding problems.

2.2 Who Are Development Extension Agents ?

There is a great number of experts, advisers, volunteers from 'developed' countries working abroad in order to extend their way of development. Not less important, however, are their backstoppers at home who work in the numerous aid agencies. And these agencies exist because the politico-economic elites of their countries believe that to develop the rest of the world requires giving away financial subsidy, material, and sending personnel along. This transfer, in turn, is possible through the cooperation of the elites of the 'developing' countries who, in their value and belief systems, have by and large similar perceptions of development as their counterparts in 'developed' countries.

What is development ? In this context, development is usually understood as moving towards the socio-economic state of affairs prevailing in the 'developed' countries, also termed 'affluent societies' or 'Ueberflussgesellschaften'. To achieve this aim, development extension agents try to induce drastic changes in values and beliefs, production and consumption patterns in the 'developing' countries.

2.3 Distrust In People's Self-Development Capability

That poverty and related problems are seemingly successfully overcome in the 'developed' part of the world seems to be the driving factor for development extension agents to provide their services, based upon strategies worked out by elite groups from 'developed' countries in cooperation with the elites of 'developing' countries. This approach does not require to put the target groups in the decision-maker's position - or could one say: to

leave them in this position ? Nor does it require to select those people from 'developed' countries as development extension agents who are most-similar to target groups, say f.e. a small farmer of old age who in his life-time has experienced many of the drastic changes in agriculture during the last few decades, or an artisan of similar life-experience. To allow such persons to cooperate with their 'peers' in Africa or Asia would require a trust in those peer groups' self-development capabilities which is not existent in elite development extension agents' minds. And probably - from the elite point of view - rightly so because it is not the small farmers and artisans who have developed modern mass-production and -consumption patterns.

If such a trust in small, poor people's self-help capabilities were existent, to remove the obstacles for self-help only might be the home-work tasks of development extension agents, which might lead elites to finding out that they are if not major obstacles then at least parts of the obstacle system. To avoid this analysis is possible through distrust - as a basic principle - in non-elite people's self-help capabilities.

2.4 The Image Of Unlimited Good

The Honorable President of the World Bank defines contemporary Western-style development efforts as a "plus-sum game, in which everybody gains ... no one looses".[6] On the other end, Foster defined the "image of limited good". "He contends that peasants commonly hold to the notion that all desirables in life (including land, wealth, health, love, power, and safety) exist in finite quantity, are always in short supply, and cannot be increased in quantity by any means within the peasant's power."[7] It is obvious that development extension agents, from their own experience in the 'developed' part of theworld, can rightly assume that the goods of this world are not as limited as, according to Foster, they appear to be to many a 'Third World' farmer. Hence the image of unlimited good. As this author was unable

to receive an answer from the WB President upon the request to get an explanation of "the principles of this (plus-sum) game, with practical, i.e. proven statistical examples"[8], it remains to be seen whether the image of development as an unlimited plus-sum game is correct or not. If it is not, then earlier philosophers like f.e. Lord Buddha who advocated a modest so-to-say a 'limited good image'-life-style may receive more attention in decades to come than the World Bank's and similar development philosophers. Lest later generations, wandering over the ruins of Volkswagen factories and of the skyscrapers of Manhattan, may explain the decay of our 'mass production throw away era' as having been caused by a lack of insight into the "Limits To Growth" in this world.

2.5 Dependence On Government Authority

Development extension agents financed by gov't funds depend on their government's decisions on policies and paths of development.[9] As opposed to gov't circles, the peoples of 'developed' countries still have great reservations about the usefulness of aid expenditures. Similarly, in the 'developing' countries, the people are widely opposed to the interference of government in their daily life. However, when they are offered gifts from government, they often accept them even if they feel that this may not be all unselfish aid but rather an instrument of making them dependant. On the other hand, the cases where 'development projects' were initiated upon people's requests are rare. Development extension agents, therefore, are working under government authority rather than under target groups' authority. Since development efforts supposedly aim at the betterment of target groups' conditions of living, there exists a double-bind responsibility of development extension agents toward those who pay for them (gov't) and those for whose interest they also ought to work (target groups' interest). This seems to create a counterproductive role conflict for development extension agents that is not easy, if possible at all, to solve.

2.6 Elitism

'Higher' formal education and entrance into the development jet set for development extension agents mean living and working conditions that separate them from the mainstream of people. This separation is justified by an elitist ideology: working for the cause of development in the upper echelons of society is a merit allowing for different living standards than those enjoy 'for whom' they work. The resulting lack of existential rapport with the target groups is experienced rather as an unavoidable by-product of working with people of deficitary educational, view-of-the-world, and living standards than as one's own deficit resulting from elitist behavior patterns.

Elitism thus is a self-assertive, self-perpetuating mechanism, result of and condition for the existence of the specialist group of development extension agents.

2.7 Lack Of Traditionalism

Human beings tend to be conservative, tradition-oriented to a great extent. They cope with daily life according to the way they have learned. Development extension agents, in their benevolent efforts for change, tend to be innovative, modernist, and they often advocate changes not according to standards of 'required minimum change' (equal to maximum possible preservation of tradition) but rather to standards of 'maximum possible change', designed according to theoretical considerations about what kind of change is desirable. Thus, in the 'developed' world, people have already become accustomed to frequent and often drastic changes in production/consumption patterns as well as in other fields.

Without trying to defend that kind of traditionalism that prevents required change from taking place, it may therefore be said that the theoretical character of the

considerations about the possible extent of change, combined with a lack of understanding of the positive aspects of traditionalism on behalf of the development extension agents often results in imposing uncalled-for, unnecessary, and destructive changes on the rest of the world.

2.8 Fatalism

To describe development extension agents as fatalistic may be a very provoking proposition because the very concept of fatalism implies resistance to change, acceptance of things as they are. Yet, the following examples may illustrate that some form of fatalism is very characteristic of development extension efforts:

- using insecticides, pesticides, anti-biotics, new drugs, they accept an unknown degree of unhealthy consequences for people exposed to these innovations;
- furthering the use of oil-base products, they neglect the foreseeable exhaustion of oil reserves in this world;
- introducing more and more nuclear energy plants, they accept long-term dangers of radioactive pollution.

The common people's reservations toward such and other innovations are often ridiculed by development extension agents with reference to the highly sophisticated risk/benefit considerations, unintelligible by common sense-level reasoning, and final resort is taken to the argument that any not yet solved man-made problems will sooner or later also be solved by man. Be that as it may, the prevailing acceptance of of known as well as unknown consequences of of such man-made large-scale risks seems to resemble intriguingly the fatalism syndrome assigned to tradition-oriented people.

2.9 Unlimited Aspirations

"Aspirations are desired future states of being, such as living level, social status, education, and occupation."[30] Development extension agents not only have very high aspirations for themselves but also promote the idea for others to have high(er) aspirations, as per quoted definition, based upon the assumption that such aspirations can be achieved in this world.

This high aspiration complex can be explained by the following phenomena: disregard for modest living standards, high individual achievement motivation combined with envy for other people's higher achievements which is propelled by modern man's inclination for conspicuous consumption.

In the 'developed' world, 'living standard' is defined by the amount of money one earns and spends. Efforts to replace this quantity-oriented concept with a 'life quality' concept have not been successful so far. This may be due to the achievement motivation syndrome which allows individuals to achieve so many 'good' things in this modern world of today even if the more or less distant fellow citizens ofthis world do not have a chance to achieve the same. At first sight, this may be incommensurate with Christian or Communist values such as equality, sharing, and justice; the concepts of 'charity' or 'international solidarity' which mainly the 'haves' can exercise, seem to make highly in-egalitarian achievements tolerable. Envy, also dressed as 'competition', plays a crucial role in surmounting reasonable inhibitions against high aspirations.

Notwithstanding the experience of unequal chances and unequal access to the goods of this world, it has remained a sine-qua-non credo of development extensionists that unlimited aspirations are conducive to 'development'.

2.1o Lack Of Deferred Gratification

This concept means that people are not ready for a "postponement of immediate satisfaction in anticipation of future rewards (Schneider and Lysgaard 1953). Peasants are typified by impulse gratification rather than by the deferred-gratification pattern. For example, they opt for spending versus saving money."[11] This concept, though minted for other groups of people, seems to be helpful for the analysis of development extension agents' behavior and frustrations, too: they enjoy high, incentive salaries long before the fruits of their development efforts can be seen, they indulge in short-term planning of two-to-five year periods and are always astonished as well as frustrated when such plans are not fulfilled; andwhen they are confronted with proposals to share the wealth of their 'developed' environment with poorer strata of mankind they renounce this idea on the grounds that there will be no significant short-term effects of this sharing due to the immense gaps between the haves and have-nots. That such sharing may be the best way of ensuring their great-great grandchildren's survival seems to be too long-term a perspective to be seriously discussed by them.

2.11 Limited View Of The World

Development extension agents view the world as a source of raw materials to produce goods for today's consumption. To say that the raw materials, including oxygen, and the self-reproductive capacity of this world's natural system are limited - a view characteristic of people in 'underdeveloped' conditions - means touching on a taboo.

The limited time perspective, characteristic of 'modern development' ideology, may be illustrated by an incident of which this author was a witness: an Honorable Professor of Agricultural Policy of a West German University, advocating the use of tractors and diesel pumps for Indian farmers, when asked whether he had ever figured out how much raw material would be required

to furnish every farmer of this world with such machinery for the next lo.ooo years or so, said that he had not done such calculations, adding that it may not be necessary either because human beings have always been able to adjust to changing conditions.

Similar self-imposed limitations of the understanding of, f.e., people living in 'remote areas' still prevail among the development extension agents in spite of all their chances to do intensive in-service travelling: wrist watch on the arm, airlines time table and the end of contract in mind, they cannot sojourn with target groups in a slow process of exchange of ideas, common analysis of the situation, based upon mutual respect for the others' own cultural conditions and understanding thereof. Superficial, short-term immersions are usually used by the development extension agent to leave some tokens of 'development' in the environment visited, 'take good care of them', and 'hopefully' - the extensionist may report - 'once used to these amenities, target groups will aspire for more of it'. That people may be able to survive under quite different conditions for many years to come, if only allowed to do so, just because they have done so for many generations, is beyond the limited view of development extension agents.

2.12 Low Empathy

The key to the understanding of this phenomenon of 'limited view' may lie in the low empathy development extension agents have for other ways of life. As Rogers/Svenning report, one Turkish peasant could not imagine to be the President of Turkey[12]. Are development extensionists in their training ever asked to be a Buddhist monk, an Indian harijan, a voodoo magician, a Rio de Janeiro slum dweller ? Is the socio-economic culture of the 'developed' countries considered as one out of many ways of life or does it usually lead development extensionists to believe that theirs is the socio-economic model to be followed ?

Training of development extensionists who go to work abroad, and their limited periods of contracts indicate that they must either be instant empathisers or that a high degree of empathy with their target groups is not considered as a conditio sine-qua-non of development extension work.

2.13 The Functional Interrelationship Of Elements In The Subculture Of Development Extension Agents

The various subculture elements described above still need scientific corroboration and multi-variate analysis of their in- or inter-dendence. It is suggested, however, that they form a highly inter-woven system of largely irrational values, beliefs, and behavior patterns that will be difficult to analyse with conventional, i.e. 'modern', scientific tools unless a rational philosophic as well as scientific framework of basic human values and corresponding behavior patterns will be developed as a reference model to validate analytical instruments.

2.14 Importance Of Modifying Development Extension Agents' Attitudes And Behaviors

(i) Why are we interested to change development extension agents ?

Development extension agents form a very small, elitist group of world-wide keypersons in the allocations of funds taken from the wealth of nations, achieved through the hard labor of the non-elitist majorities. They try to impose on the majorities a way of life that is not subject to long-term ex-ante evaluation nor to mass-participatory decision-making.

(ii) The resources/consumption imbalance

The present rates of resource consumption by the minority groups of 'developed' nations endangers the subsistence of mankind. In order for this world to subsist for hundreds

and thousands ofgenerations to-be-born, the present path of development as propagated by the development extension agents does not appar to be appropriate.

The 'population explosion', according to development extension agents, is a big challenge to the future of mankind. It is likely that farmers around the world will realise soon that they cannot feed the number of children they are used to have. The development extension agents, however, though in possession of divine methods and machines for the calculation of all kinds of developments, have not yet used those instruments to assess the long-term effects of their development model, or - as far as such assessments have been made - have not yet cared enough to re-assess their model.

(iii) Widening gaps

The continued prevalence of the 'modern development model' has resulted in widening gaps between rich and poor in this world, in the eradication of subsistence living models, in the displacement of large groups of rural populace, in the structural extinction of millions of working places through the development of human labor-replacing machines; at the same time, the chances for the 'developing' world to enjoy the resources of this world are diminishing due to the irrenewable exploitation of which by the 'developed' nations.

(iv) Revolution, political instability and the future of mankind

If the unscrupulous though benevolent efforts of the development extension agents continue to go along the same lines, the poor, expropriated, displaced majorities of mankind may resort to violence towards their national andinternational adversaries. This is not the future we should like to wish for our children.

3. AGAIN: WHAT IS 'DEVELOPMENT' ?

Overrun, corrupted, flattered, and pleased by the modern socio-economic model of 'development', many people in this world have accepted the values of the industrial mass-production-and-consumption-oriented development model. As doubts about the long-term feasibility of this model increase, we should discuss the model advocated by the contemporary development extension agents vis-a-vis the age-old knowledge of subsistence-oriented farmers, artisans, philosophers, and priests, from all over the world.

If the continued existence of mankind on this earth is our aim, we may have to adopt a subsistence-oriented rather than a growth-minded model of development, even if we hope that mankind will be able to enjoy more material wealth than a traditional subsistence farmer was able to. Growth, therefore, shall be allowed as far as it does not prevent long-term subsistence.

This approach - modern or traditional ? - is summarised in the following attempt to formulate what 'development' is:

Can 'development' mean more for us human beings than a state in which we satisfy our needs in a way that neither endangers human life nor irrenewably consumes or changes our life-basis: the balanced existence of animals and plants, and of all other natural elements and their interactions ?

Footnotes:

1) This paper's author used the German edition only: J.K. Galbraith, Die Arrognaz der Satten, Scherz Verlag, Bern und Muenchen 1980.

2) This author's own summary translation from the German edition, pp. 24/25.

3) Title of Chapter 2 of Modernisation Among Peasants. The Impact of Communication. E.M. Rogers in association with Lynne Svenning. New York 1969.

4) See f.e. the World Bank publication by N. Colletta, E. Rogers, J. Mbindyo: Social and Cultural Influences on Human Development Policiies and Programs, Part IV (German edition: 1982).

5) Rogers/Svenning use the following headlines and sub-titles for the analysis of peasantry:

- why study peasants ?
- who are peasants ?
- importance of modifying peasant attitudes and behaviors
- the subculture of peasantry
- mutual distrust in interpersonal relations
- perceived limited good
- dependence on and hostility toward gov't authority
- familism
- lack of innovativeness
- fatalism
- limited aspirations
  - achievement motivation
  - inconspicuous consumption
- lack of deferred gratification
- limited view of the world
  - limited time perspective
  - localiteness
- low empathy

- functional interrelationship of elements in the subculture of peasantry
- the subculture of tradition.

6) World Bank President's essay in the Far Eastern Economic Review advertisement supplement, Sept. 3, 1982.

7) Rogers/Svenning, op. cit., p. 28.

8) From this author's letter to the WB President, Sept. 2o, 1982, unpublished.

9) The same applies, mutatis mutandis, to private enterprise development extension agents, it seems.

1o) Rogers/Svenning, op. cit., p. 3[illegible].

11) ibid., p. 35.

12) ibid., p. 38.